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Literary Selections.

ALICE WOOD.

A TALE FOR THE NEW YEAR.

BY VIRGINIA F. TOWNSEND.

The house was an old, reddish-brown, angular sort of contrivance—I might have said building, but this seemed altogether too respectable an appellation for such a rickety, unpicturesque, tumble-down affair as the one in question.

It stood all alone, sheltered from the bleak winds of the common by the little wood on the right. It was early in December, and the first snow fall had covered the roof and the small front yard with a thin white frosting, that gave the whole a colder, gloomier aspect than ever.

The wind was battling up and down the commons; the moon, large, clear and cold, was topling over the distant mountains, and glittering on the snow that covered the roof of the reddish-brown house on the night of which I write.

If you could put aside the breadth of white muslin which covers the solitary window on the east side of the house, you could see at one glance all its occupants.

They are but two, and they sit together by the fire of driftwood, which snaps and crackles noisily up the great lips of the chimney, and fills the whole room with a ruddy, wine-like glow, deepening and softening the old corners, and giving the few chairs, the large bureau, and the narrow table a quaint picturesqueness of outline and position which in broad daylight you would never dream of their possessing.

But the twain who sit by the fire? You see at once they are mother and daughter; for the delicate casting of the younger face, the large, blue, shadowy eyes, like lakes sleeping under mountain mists, the sweet, half-sad mouth, are but a second edition, improved and intensified, it may be, of what the elder one must have been. But this latter face it would have made your heart ache to look on it, it was so thin, and pale, and sorrowful. You felt it could not be long above the grave mould, and that the heart beneath it must have a history written with tears.

So it had. Mrs. Wood was the daughter of a proud family, and a rich one, but in her youth she had loved the son of her father's gardener. It was not very strange for they had grown up together, and passed half their time among the flowers and trees of the large, old garden of the girl's home.

Alice was motherless, and she entered her girlhood with her strong self-will developed and fostered by her father and brother, who petted and spoiled her. But one night a scene occurred in the drawing-room of the grey old mansion which changed the hearts of all three, and separated them forever. Alice's father had learned that day of her engagement to his gardener's son.

"If you ever speak to Harold Wood again," said the old man, briefly and bitterly, "you shall go out from yonder door no longer a child of mine."

"I'll knock him down for his audacity, the dog, if he ever dares to cross my path again," muttered her fiery brother, his dark eyes flashing their defiance into his sister's white face, as she stood speechless and seemingly frozen into a statue by the mantle.

They were the first harsh words her father and brother had ever spoken to her; they were the last. The next day she was gone, and a week later the village paper published the marriage of Alice Mellen and Harold Wood. If they had dealt gently and kindly with her; if they had told her it would well-nigh break their hearts to give up thus the joy and the brightness of their home, she would not, in pride and bitterness, have done this thing.

But Alice had the proud will of the Mellens. She went south with her husband. Her name was never spoken at home. Her father and brother knew not whether she were among the living or the dead.

"Alice, darling," said the mother, breaking the long silence that had fallen upon the two, "it is very late; had we not better take our supper?"

"I do not feel hungry this evening, dear mamma," the girl answered, in a quick, half embarrassed manner, turning her face from the fire-shine. "But I will get some toast and tea for you."

The lady shook her head sadly. "I could not eat it, dear, if you did; I spoke only for yourself. Come and sit down here, Alice," and she moved out the stool on which her feet had rested.

Alice flung herself down on it, and the mother drew her bright head into her lap and smoothed with her thin fingers the soft, rich hair very tenderly, and looked with mournful, yearning fondness into the sweet face.

"It is very like the one the glass used to show me, twenty years ago, in the old chamber that looked out on the mulberry trees," she said, half-dreamily, as though her eyes, turned inward, were looking at it now.

"The roses are growing round the east window large, and thick, and red; there are no such roses in the woods of New England. Alice I wish you would gather some of them for me. Papa had the vines brought from Italy."

"Mamma! mamma! don't look at me so. What are you saying?" Alice's face was blanched with terror as she shook her mother's arm.

Mrs. Wood recovered herself. "Don't be frightened, dear," she said; "I am so weak my mind wanders sometimes. But it has come back to the present now. How long is it since we sold the lounge?"

"Two weeks yesterday;" the daughter whispered these words.

"Two weeks yesterday, and it was only five dollar at first? I see now, dear child, why you weren't hungry this evening. The money has all gone?"

Alice bowed her head in her hands, and the tears streamed through her fingers.

Her mother put her thin, cold arms round the drooping neck. "Don't cry, my little girl," she said. "Go to the upper drawer, and bring me the little yellow box in one corner."

And Alice brought it, and leaned over her mother while she removed the cover; for though she had seen the face inside very often, it was one that never grew old to her.

"It looks just as I remembered him," she murmured, as her mother held up the miniature in a broad wave of the firelight.

It was that of a middle-aged gentleman; and the manly face, with its dark hazel eyes, and the smile lurking about the corners of the large, generous mouth, would have won your regard at once.

A look of beautiful, womanly tenderness outshone from Mrs. Wood's pale face as she bent over the miniature. "We should never have been here if he had lived, Alice. O, never wife had a more tender husband, never child a more loving father! It was a bright home that I left for his sake, and while he lived I never regretted it. But it may be I was hasty and self-willed. May be, if I had waited longer, my tears and prayers would have softened somewhat *their* proud hearts."

It was the first time Mrs. Wood had spoken thus of the past to her child.

"Alice," she said, with an effort coming back again to the present, "to-morrow you must take this to the jeweler's. It will be very hard to part with it, for *his* sake; but it is all we have, and you must not starve. They will only want the setting, so you can still have the face."

Alice knew the struggle it was costing her mother to part with the miniature. She looked around the room, but there was nothing more to spare from its furniture. They had parted with everything but the barest necessities.

"If I could only get some work to do," sighed the poor girl.

"No, it's for the best, Alice, you couldn't get the situation in the factory, for your mother will want you with her but a little while longer."

"A little while longer! What do you mean, mamma?" It was strange Alice should ask this question—strange that while her mother's eye grew dim and her step fainter each day, that the *truth* had never flashed into the girl's mind.

But it had not, and so she turned her large shadowy eyes upon her mother wonderingly, as she repeated, "What do you mean, mamma?"

"You must have a brave heart, my daughter, when I tell you. It is high time now, but I have kept it back, day by day, hoping you would see it yourself. Alice, in a few days more, God will call your mother to himself."

For a moment she did not comprehend this; and when at last the fearful meaning crept home to her heart and brain, she did not shriek or faint, but O, what a groan was that with which she bowed her white face upon her mother's knee!

"Don't take it so hard, dear child," said the mother, leaning over her. "It seems but a step out from the cold and darkness to the warmth and light, and glory *there*. The great Father calls me with his voice of love. I do not fear. I shall be glad to go."

Alice looked up in her mother's face. The light that surged over it was not born of this world. It hushed the murmur of the girl's heart. Heaven, *soul's Fatherland*, seemed to come very near them.

"Take me with you, mamma; I shall be all alone. There will be none left to love me when you are"— she could not speak the last word.

"Not yet, Alice, my child. You are not eighteen yet, and God may have much work for you to do before the night comes.

"You must not think of me as dead when the snow is above me, only as gone first. There is but one way, you know, and Christ, the All-Friend, will lead you up it.

"You will not give way, dear, when the trial comes. It will bring but one pang—that of leaving you."

Alice did not trust herself to answer; but she wondered at the great calm that had come over her soul.

Afterward they talked of the girl's future; and though it did not seem very clearly defined, yet neither felt any great anxiety about it.

"You can get some employment for the winter, I doubt not, and in the spring you can open a small infant school," said the mother.

"God will bring you friends as you need them"—she paused a moment. "It may be that sometime you will meet your uncle. He would not visit his anger for the mother on her orphan child. Three times since our father died have I written to him, and the letters came back to me unopened. Be sure and tell him that Alice forgave him all before she went home"—a severe fit of coughing broke the sentence, and when it passed, Mrs. Wood was too far exhausted to complete it.

An hour later the mother and daughter were sleeping quietly in each other's arms, while nearer and nearer drew the dark feet of Death to the reddish-brown house.

Five hundred miles away, in the deep heart of one of our Atlantic cities, stands a large granite mansion. The moonlight surges with the tree-shadows over its massive front and about the marble pillars and white portico.

The blinds are all drawn closely, and the rooms on the front are all darkened, except one of the chambers, where the light loses itself among the damask curtains, and breaks dimly through the clinks of the blind.

That chamber is a study and a luxury with its rich carpet strewed with Paestum roses, and lilies that looked as if they had opened their creamy lips on the green banks of Lake Nemi, with the Claude sunset pictures smiling along its walls, and the graceful statues in the opposite corners.

There are but three occupants of the room, for the physician has just left. First, and least of these, is the nurse, who sits drowsing in her large arm-chair by the grate. The next is a youth—he cannot have seen more than twenty summers—who stands by the heavily carved bedside. He is tall and slender, with thin, clearly cut features; and you can see that there is a great disquiet at his heart, by the eager anxiety with which he gazes down on the pillows and the face half turned away from him.

Paul Mellen is not the sick man's son, but he could not love his adopted father with more intensity if he were. Seventeen years since Paul's aunt, the wife of Willard Mellen, died, and left him childless. Paul's mother followed her sister, and because the boy's eyes and smile were like the the twin pair under the summer grass, the widower took him to his heart and home. So Paul grew up in the old granite mansion, the heir and idol of his proud uncle, Willard Mellen.

But the time to die has come suddenly to the rich man. He is not old yet; the thick, dark hair on the pillow is only frosted with silver, and the face beneath it, with its few wrinkles, can not belong to a life that has covered much more than fifty years.

But the fever has stricken him in the midst of his days. You look on the proud face, with the story of an iron will written in every muscle, curving the parched lips, and printed on the broad forehead, and you feel Death's hand is drawing near it.

Paul fears this, though he does not acknowledge it even to himself, as he leans over the sick man and moistens his temples with the ice-water from the cut-glass goblet on the marble stand. The sick man moans and mutters in his unquiet slumber. Suddenly his eyes open; but Paul knows by their glassiness that he does not see him, though he puts his face down and whispers, "How do you feel now, father?"

"Was it Allie called me?" murmurs the sick man. "There she is putting her head out of the window, and the red roses shone around it like rubies, and the curls toss over her face like sunshine.

"Alice, sweet sister, come down to me; the raspberries are ripe along the field hedges to day, and we will go out and gather them. She bows her head; she whispers with her bright smile, 'Willard, I am coming.'

"She is running down the steps now. Is she not a picture, as her white bonnet swings in her hand?

"Our father comes round from the arbor, and looks at her with eyes full of love and pride. Do you see the kisses she flings him? Do you hear her laugh climbing up to the echoes in the hills yonder? O, Alice, my sister, sweet image of my dead mother, how do we love you!

"We are out by the field hedges now, and our baskets are almost filled with berries.

"Somebody is coming up through the meadows, and he is beckoning to Alice. I see his face. It is the son of our old gardner." And now the look of scorn and hatred that crossed the sick man's face was fearful. "If I could reach him, if I could knock him down and stamp the life out of him for his temerity!

"Alice, Alice, do not leave me. She is going, going to him. I could not hold her back. There are tears on her sweet face, but she does not turn away.

"I must go to her father alone, and tell him that Alice, the light and the love of both our hearts, is gone—gone to the gardener's son, Harold Wood!

"It is done. I have told our father all, and he has sworn in his wrath that her name shall never be spoken under his roof—that she shall be as the dead to him!

"O, Alice, Alice, my golden-haired sister, how we love you! *But our pride was greater than our love!*"

And so through the long hours the sick man moaned and murmured in his wanderings, as the years of his youth came up from their burial places, and walked, each like a living presence before him.

The light of the newly waking December day was struggling gray and gloomy through the windows when Willard Mellen sank into a fitful slumber. He did not wake for several hours, and when he did he knew that day must be his last.

"Paul, Paul," moaned the dying man, "pray for me!"

And Paul could not for his agony, for, alas! his heart had never learned submission to the will of the All-Father, and he had well-nigh forgotten the prayer his mother taught him in his childhood.

But they sent for a minister, and after a petition whose childlike faith and fervency softened every heart in that sick chamber, he adjured the dying man solemnly. "If there be any work you have left undone, if there be any you have wronged, or any you have left un forgiven, I beseech you, in the name of that God before whom you must soon appear, settle these things with your own soul."

A deeper shadow came over the dying face.

"Leave me alone with Paul," said Willard Mellen.

And there, for the first time, the young man learned the history of his adopted father's early life, of the sister upon whose face he had not looked for twenty years.

All was told briefly, amid dying spasms, alternating with bitter reproaches, and concluded with these words:

"You know my father died suddenly, Paul, and left me all his property, as my will does you all mine.

"One morning, less than a year afterward, I received a letter, and I knew the handwriting was my sister's. Years had only hardened my heart toward her, for I always thought her marriage broke my father's proud heart. I returned it unanswered. Five years later there came another, and less than six months ago the last one. Both shared the fate of the first. I have since learned incidentally that Alice's husband was dead, and that she had removed to the north with her child. That is all I know of her.

"And, now, Paul, I have made my will; I have left you my heir, and it is too late to add a codicil. But, after I am gone, I want you to seek Alice, and tell her with your own lips, that her brother, on his dying bed, acknowledged the wrong he had done her, and asked her pardon with his last breath."

The young man bowed his head.

"And you will make over to her and her child twenty five thousand dollars. You will have enough left then, Paul."

And Paul promised.

"Put your hands in mine now, my boy, for I cannot see you, and pledge yourself solemnly that you will persevere through every obstacle, that you will not give up the search, till you have seen Alice, till you have done this."

And the early setting daylight looked with a sweet, sad smile into the chamber and flickered over the proud head of Paul Mellen as he bowed it to that solemn pledge.

The sick man's head fell back, a slight spasm crossed his features, and the daylight and the life-day of Willard Mellen went out together.

It was the last night of the old year—cold and and clear and bright with stars. The wind was intoning its hoarse burial service over the bleak commons, and the snow had lain a deeper fold on the roof of the reddish-brown house. Inside the drift-wood fire was rushing and reeling up the black lips of the chimney, and filling the room with its beautiful wine-like glow, just as before.

It was very late, but Mrs. Wood still sat in her great arm-chair, and Alice at her feet; and looking down into the half-lighted room, the angels saw a third standing very near them; there was love in his eyes and a smile on his lips as he leaned over Mrs. Wood. O, is it not the will of the All-Father that Death always should meet us thus?

"I am very cold, Alice; is the fire going out?"

The girl sprang up. "O, no mamma. I brought in six six large armsful from the wood to-night, We'll soon have it warm enough;" and she heaped on a fresh pile of sticks, and then, in the brighter light, turned to her mother's face.

A change had come over it. For the last two or three days Mrs. Wood had been growing feebler; but Alice did not dream that the fading eyes and trembling tones indicated that the parting was close at hand.

She drew the old shawls carefully around her mother. "How I wish we had a candle, mamma!" sighed the girl. That day she expended the last cent which the sale of the miniature had brought her.

There was a loud knock at the door at that moment. Alice started, but her mother *did not hear it*.

The girl groped her way through the little entry to the front door and opened it. A young man stood there. She saw the outlines of his tall figure and clear features in the dim starlight.

"Does a Mrs. Alice Wood reside here?"

"Yes, sir." The astonished, half-frightened girl thought of the unlighted room, and stammered out, "If you have any message I will deliver it to her. She is very ill."

"But I *must* see her. I have something of vital importance to communicate to the lady."

Poor Alice! All the pride and delicacy of her gentle nature revolted at the confession, but there was no help for it, and it came at last, with a break of tears, "*We have no light in the house.*"

"*No light!*" What a tone of astonishment duplicated the girl's words! "Stay! there is a lantern in the carriage; I will be back in a moment;" and the stranger hurried out into the road.

"Mamma, mamma, it is very strange—a young gentleman has come who insists upon seeing you. He has gone for a lantern. Who can it be?" cried the excited Alice, as she returned to her mother.

But there was no answer. The white face rested, as Alice had left it, against the chair back.

"Mamma, mamma, why don't you answer me?" At this moment the stranger entered, she turned her wild frightened eyes toward him. "Mamma does not speak to me," she said, with pitiful earnestness, all her timidity lost in a greater terror.

It was very light in the room now. The young gentleman came forward and looked at Mrs. Wood. So did Alice. When their eyes met they told the same story: "*Dead! dead!* DEAD!"

Just then the village clock struck twelve. The year and the life of Mrs. Wood had gone out together.

Five years have passed. It is nightfall of another dying year, and the bells are ringing out a joyous welcome to the new one, near the large grey mansion, in the study of which Paul Mellen sits leaning over a volume of Blackstone.

The sweet bells break upon his ear, and down into his heart, like a stirring rhyme, and he tosses down the large volume impatiently, and paces up and down the study, for those clear voiced bells have struck new vitality into his heart. Look at him; he is a little changed. The whole face has a tone of deeper manliness; but the clear features and the proud, sweet mouth that were his mother's are the same.

"How lonely the old house will be all to-morrow," he muses, "with nobody but the housekeeper and the domestics! If Alice were only here, her blue eyes would light up the stately gloom of the old rooms and there would be sunshine all over them.

"I know the reason she has declined coming up here to live since she graduated last fall; and may be the world would think it strange, as we are only cousin in name.

"It is five years this night since her mother died. How well I remember it all—the little room lighted by the red fire flames, and she who sat by it, with the smile of an angel on her dead lips.

"Alice will think of it too, poor girl; I know she will to-night; and her schoolmates cannot chase the shadows from her heart. Am I not her nearest relative, and should'nt I go to her? *I will!*

"The train starts in about two hours, and I could reach the village by midnight and go up in the morning and pass the day at the school, for, of course, they'll have a holiday;" and Paul mellen hurried out of the study, and told the first domestic he met in the hall to have a carriage sent up from the depot at precisely half past six.

"Why, Paul isn't here! He must have stepped out while I was up stairs," murmured Alice Wood, as she entered the private seminary parlor on a New Year afternoon. You would know her at once, though five years of earnest study have given a more thoughtful *womanly* character to the sweet face that beams out upon in its fair Saxon beauty, reminding you of the paintings which have hung for centuries in dim, old English corridors.

"How kind it was in Paul to remember me to day!" murmurs the girl, crossing her hands behind her, and walking up and down the room. "How his coming has chased away all the shadows that this day always brings to my heart! Dear Paul! my cousin, my brother! It is too bad I didn't know he was coming, so I might have had some New-Year's gift for him. If I only had something"—

"You have, Alice, something that will be more precious than all else in the world," said Paul Mellen's deep voice as he came out from the alcove in which he had listened to Alice's monologue.

"Why, Paul! who would have believed you were there?" with an embarrassed laugh and kindling cheeks.

"Yes, I was playing the eaves-dropper, forgive me; it is the first time. But you haven't answered my remark about the gift?"

"What is it, Paul? You shall certainly have it."

He laid his hand on her shoulder. "It is *yourself*, Alice."

She looked up wildly for a moment, but she could not misinterpret the question of those eyes. Her head dropped, the tears filled her eyes, but she laid her hands in Paul's, saying, not to her betrothed, but to her Father in Heaven. "Would that the gift were more worthy of him."

THE WAY THEY CLEAR THE COURT AT TOLEDO.—The Toledo *Blade* of the 19th says:

One of our lawyers, who was sitting forth the merrits of his own case before a Toledo Justice, had a misunderstanding with his honor as to his rights. Whereupon some harsh words passed between him and the Justice, and his honor threatened to put him out of the Court, which, after some further words, was attempted. Our legal friend responded in eloquent blows, and his argument, this time, was appreciated. He cleaned the room of justice, and lawyers, and Court, and when a constable was called to do what his honor had failed to do, and came forward shaking his shillalah over the head of the offender, he laid out his last sprig of official authority.

THE POPULATION OF THE WORLD.—According to the "American Almanac for 1857," the population of the globe is as follows:

Africa,	100,000,000
America,	57,676,882
Asia and Islands,	626,000 000
Australia and Islands,	1,245,000
Europe,	263,517,521
Polynesia,	1,500,000
Total.	1,050,139,403

"The ancient Greeks buried their dead in jars." Hence the the origin of the expression—"He's gone to pot."

OLD CUSTOMS IN NEW ENGLAND.

In most families, the first exercise of the morning was reading the Bible, followed by a prayer, at which all were assembled, including the servants and helpers of the kitchen and farm. Then came the breakfast, which was a substantial meal, always including hot viands, with vegetables, apple sauce, pickles, mustard, horseradish, and various other condiments. Cider was the common drink for laboring people; even children drank it at will. Tea was common, but not so general as now. Coffee was almost unknown. Dinner was a still more hearty and varied repast—characterized by an abundance of garden vegetables; tea was a light supper.

The day begun early; breakfast was had at six in summer and seven in winter; dinner at noon—the work people in the fields being called to their meals by a conch shell, usually winded by some kitchen Triton. The echoing of this noon-tide horn from farm to farm, and over hill and dale, was a species of music which even rivalled the popular melody of drum and fife. Tea—the evening meal—usually took place about sundown. In families where all were laborers, all sat at one table, servants as well as masters—the food being served before sitting down. In families where the masters and mistresses did not share the labors of the household or the farm, the meals of the domestics were had separate.—There was, however, a perfectly good understanding and good feeling between the masters and servants. The latter were not Irish; they had not as yet imbibed the plebian envy of those above them, which has since so generally embittered and embarrassed American domestic life. The terms democrat and aristocrat had not got into use; these distinctions, and the feelings now implied by them, had, indeed, no existence in the hearts of the people. Our servants, during all my early life, were of the neighborhood, generally the daughters of respectable farmers and mechanics, and respecting others, were themselves respected and cherished. They were devoted to the interests of the family, and were always relied upon and treated as friends. In health they had the same food; in sickness the same care as the masters and mistresses of their children. This servitude implied no degredation, because it did not degrade the heart or manners of those subjected to it. It was never thought of as a reproach to a man or a woman, in the stations they afterwards filled, that he or she had been out to service. If servitude has since become associated with debasement, it is only because servants themselves, under the bad guidance of demagogues, have lowered their calling by low feelings and low manners.

At the period of my earliest recollections, men of all classes were dressed in long, broad-tailed coats, with huge pockets, long waistcoats, and breeches. Hats had low crowns, with broad brims—some so wide as to be supported at the sides with cords. The stockings of the parson, and a few others, were of silk in summer and worsted in winter; those of the people were generally of wool, and blue and gray mixed. Women dressed in wide bonnets, sometimes of straw and sometimes of silk; the gowns were of silk, muslin, gingham, &c., generally close and short waisted, the breast and shoulders being covered by a full muslin kerchief. Girls ornamented themselves with a large white vandyke. On the whole, the dress of both men and woman has greatly changed.

The amusements were then much the same as at present—though some striking differences may be noted. Books and newspapers, which are now diffused even among the country towns, so as to be in the hands of all, young and old, were then scarce, and were respectfully, and as if they were grave matters demanding thought and attention. They were not toys and pastimes, taken up every day, and by everybody, in the short intervals of labor, and then hastily dismissed, like waste paper. The aged sat down when they read, and drew forth their spectacles, and put them deliberately and reverentially upon the nose. These instruments were not as now, like tortoiseshell hooks, attached to a ribbon, and put off and on with a jerk, but they were made of silver or steel, substantially made, and calculated to hold on with a firm and steady grasp, showing the gravity of the uses to which they were devoted.—*Goodrich's Recollections.*

☞ When is charity like a top? When it begins to hum.